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ABSTRACT

Since 1988, the governance and organization of education in England and Wales have moved decisively in the direction of decentralization and site-based management. Under the Education Reform Act of 1988 and the Education Act of 1993, local education agencies (LEAs) have acquired new responsibilities via local management of schools (LMS) and grant-maintained (GM) or "opted out" status. In addition, the moves toward school autonomy must be placed in a framework that requires schools to compete for pupils within local educational markets. However, in England and Wales, there is a tension between managerial decentralization and educational centralization. This paper describes how this tension arose and its implications for the scope and direction of grant-maintained schools' policy. The first section discusses the five different principles of school autonomy--state control, community responsiveness, management, curriculum and pedagogy, and pupil identity. The second section describes the background of the GM schools' policy. Recent developments in the policy are highlighted in the third section. The concluding section reviews the extent to which GM schools are state or community regulated and responsive, and identifies trends for 1989-94 in the areas of the five principles of school autonomy. (LMI)

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GRANT-MAINTAINED STATUS : SCHOOL AUTONOMY

OR STATE CONTROL

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Introduction

Since 1988 the governance and the organisation of education in England and Wales (1) has moved decisively in the direction of decentralisation and site-based management. Under the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Education Act 1993, via Local Management of Schools (LMS) and grant-maintained (GM) or 'opted out' status, schools have acquired new financial, resource and managerial responsibilities at the expense of local education authorities (LEAs). Decentralisation has been coupled with diversification through the creation of new categories of schools such as City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and GM schools which operate alongside LEA maintained schools. Under a funding regime which is per capita based, diversified and decentralised schools. The moves towards school autonomy thus have to be placed in a framework which requires schools to compete for pupils within local educational markets.

Paradoxically, however, decentralisation, diversity and school autonomy are rather more severely constrained in England and Wales than otherwise might appear to be the case. Increased financial and managerial responsibility has not been matched by gaining the schools' capacities to determine the kind of educational (curriculum and pedagogical) programmes they offer. What schools are to transmit, including GM schools, has been increasingly centrally directed. This tension, between managerial decentralisation, and educational centralisation pervades the notion of school autonomy in UK. Much of this paper will be devoted to understanding how this tension arose and its implications for the scope and direction of grant-maintained schools' policy.

We turn first, however, to a further consideration of the principles which might be brought to bear in the further analysis of school autonomy; principles which permit the evaluation of school autonomy cross-nationally, or between different kinds of schools within one national system. It is possible to identify five different axes of 'freedom from' or 'control over' against which we might evaluate the relative autonomy of schools within or between systems. Any discussion of autonomy implies some understanding of what is this or that institution is autonomous from, and, to what degree. In the case of schools in the national systems under discussion in this symposium, autonomy relates to their freedom to operate outside the control of local, (elected) school boards or authorities. This has been exchanged, in one form or another by some form of 'community' control, either by Local Schools Councils (e.g. Chicago) (Ford, 1992), reconstituted governing bodies (UK) or by parent charters (NZ). This relationship is buttressed in the UK by per

capita funding regimes and by central government grants which are intended to make schools responsive to parental wishes.

The first principle for evaluating school autonomy, therefore, is their relative freedom from state control and the degree to which they are 'community-responsive' institutions. The second, concerns their capacity to own and manage resources (plant, staff, equipment) independently of the state. In the UK, for example, this is a key area of difference between GM schools which have all these powers, and LMS schools where the LEA continues to own the buildings and is the designated employer of teachers. The third principle is the extent to which schools are free to design and deliver their own educational programmes. Fourth is the extent to which schools are able to select, assemble and reproduce specialised pupil identities. This refers to the school's capacities to operate admission procedures, devise appropriate curriculum and pedagogical regimes, install disciplinary procedures, promote particular values, and specialise in curriculum areas with the intention of producing pupil identities distinctively different from other schools.

We might represent these principles in the following way:

	Self-governance in Respect of:	
	+	-
State control.	+	-
Community responsiveness.	+	-
Management	+	-
Curriculum and pedagogy.	+	-
Pupil identity.	+	-
	(+ strong; - weak.)	

Clearly there are a number of possible combinations here and these can be employed to describe the relative degrees of independence exercised by schools within and across national systems. GM schools, for example, when first established, were relatively weak in the control they exercised over curriculum/pedagogy and pupil identity, but strong in the management area. In this respect they are unlike New Zealand schools where parents, in association with

schools, have the power to determine admission policies (pupil identity). Apart from 'bulk funded' schools, however, GM were relatively more autonomous in the area of 'management' than NZ schools. In addition, the various combinations of different elements will also have implications for the internal organisation of schools, particularly the form of power and control exercised by heads/principals, forms of specialisation of labour within the teaching staff, curriculum organisation (facilities or subjects) and pedagogic strategies (streaming/tracking, all ability grouping, etc.). It is against this background that we now turn to explore in more detail the character and the implications of school autonomy of GM schools. The next section of this paper will be devoted to the background and context of GM schools' policy. We will then consider recent developments in the policy and conclude by reviewing the extent to which GM schools are state or community regulated and responsiveness.

GM Schools' Policy : Background and Context

The Education Reform Act 1988 enabled state schools, after a ballot of parents, to 'opt out', or leave control of their LEA, and receive funding by grant, direct from central government (see Filz, Halpin and Power, 1993). As autonomous incorporated institutions, GM schools, through their governing bodies, own their buildings, employ and dismiss their staff, manage their own budgets relating to capital and recurrent costs, devise their own in-service programmes of staff development and manage their own market image. They are responsible directly to the Secretary of State for the expenditure of public money and for the quality of education they provide. At the same time, they are also subject to the vagaries of parental choice as the bulk of their grants are determined by a per capita formula. The governing body has an in-built majority of appointed (and self-appointed) governors, greater in number than the five elected parents and one or two elected teacher governors (the head is ex-officio) (Maclure, 1988). There are no political appointees, unlike the LMS governing bodies. They have the powers of hire and fire, including the head/principal, and are ultimately responsible for the school's performance. The composition of the governing body, however, does not suggest that these are 'community responsive' schools. Only a minority of the members are elected, and they represent parents and teachers. It is the appointees who represent the community at large. Here, the emphasis has been on appointing members of the 'business' community. Additionally, the Secretary of State has powers to appoint governors to GM schools where it is thought that a school is in difficulty, and in the case of the Stratford School in London, he has already employed these powers. The Stratford case is instructive insofar as it involved a dispute between the head and the chair of governors and a small number of allies,

as to who ran the school and who spoke for the community. In this case the head prevailed. Our research, however, suggests that the lack of clarity in boundary between school governance and school management. In other words, there is an area for dispute over who it is who runs a school, head or the governing body. Certainly some GM heads we interviewed were surprised that no attempt had been made in the 1993 Education Act to rectify what seemed to them an unpalatable arrangement (see Wohlstetter and Anderson, 1994).

The first schools to achieve GM status had limited control over key areas of their operation. They were required to teach the national curriculum and participate in its associated testing procedures, they could not change their character (all ability schools could not become academically selective), nor increase their size, nor change their admission policies (to extend the age range of an 11-16 school to include 17 and 18 year olds for example) without the consent of the Secretary of State. As we noted at the beginning of this paper, these constraints make GM schools very different from their counterparts in Europe and in schools the various 'choice' programmes in the USA (Boyd, 1993; Hess, 1991 and Chubb and Moe, 1990). In other words, GM schools may buy and sell land and buildings, hire and fire staff, but they are constrained in the area of curriculum and pedagogic provision and innovation. How then do we account for this within the overall context of a decisive shift in the direction of freeing schools from the control of local state bureaucracies?

The various determinants of the character, scope and direction of GM schools' policy, including the tension between the decentralisation of 'management' and the centralisation of 'education' can only be sketched out in a rudimentary fashion here. Needless to say there are several loosely articulated levels, economic, social, political and cultural, which have influenced the form of school autonomy embedded in GM status. These are:

- a. A particular form of Anglo-American capitalism which emphasises competition between economic enterprises within a framework of freedom from state control via the process of 'deregulation'. It is, in the words of David Marquand a 'fast buck, short-term profit-maximising, investment skipping capitalism of the English-speaking world' (Marquand, 1994). In its British form, public policy has aimed to form an economy which supports capital markets, while cutting labour costs, under-training its work-force while steadily reducing the tax burden on corporations and the so-called 'wealth producing' (read high-earners) individuals. Policy designed to reduce tax burdens and state controls have led to:

- b. A prolonged squeeze on public institutions' finances, especially in the areas of health, welfare and education, combined with attempts to persuade individuals to take more responsibility for these areas of their lives. This programme includes a sustained ideological assault on the efficiency of public service institutions and on the value of the work done by professionals in the public sector.

The two agendas combine in criticisms of the public sector which are said to be 'producer dominated' and thus not accountable sufficiently to the tax paying public. The proposed remedy has involved the introduction of internal markets within public sector institutions, quasi-markets which force institutions to compete, compulsory competitive tendering which force public sector workers and organisations to compete against the private sector to carry out state-funded programmes, alongside the widespread introduction of 'agencies' within civil service departments which provide services to the public within a specified budget and against a background of performance targets. This has involved:

- c. The introduction of presumed practices of the private sector into public service institutions and agencies. These have included such things as performance-related pay, appraisal, but most notably, site-based management practices. In connection with GM policy, for example, one of its most notable advocates, Stuart Sexton, drew on his experiences with Shell Oil and its history of devolving decision-making, in his justification for self-governing schools (2). In one sense, it is the transfer of private sector practices into the public sector, especially site-based management which accounts for the global emergence of systems of devolved school governance. In the UK context it was argued by GM advocates that it would lead to gains in managerial efficiency which in turn would be translated into higher educational standards.

- d. Sustained attempts to reduce the power and control of local government, in the areas of housing, welfare and education. These have taken the form of reducing the tax-collecting powers of local authorities while enabling central government to determine increasingly, via its direct grants, the scope and direction of local services. In education, the 1988 Education Reform Act, and subsequent circulars and legislation, have articulated a closer relationship between what Kenneth Baker called 'the hub' (central government) and 'the ruin of individual schools'. Disconnection of LEAs from the circuits of policy-making and provision in education at the same time as it enabled the state to ensure centrally determined policies were implemented, also removed the influence of

educational professionals ('the educational establishment') from the policy-making cycle (3). The establishment of self-governing schools was intended to achieve these aims relatively efficiently. These measures are also related to:

- e. Electoral opportunism. Diversification of the education system it was argued and extension of choice to education to parents who had not had the chance to exercise it, targeted those constituents who previously had purchased their rented council houses. In addition, the policy was also mounted as a further attack on the supposed bureaucratic and ideological excerpts of 'left wing' minor urban local authorities (see Filz, Halpin and Power, 1993). It was then, part of a sustained campaign to win over sections of the working class vote, building on the success of previous appeals to council-house owners to support Conservative policies. Co-existing within the neo-liberals within the Conservative Party, however, are those devoted to:

- f. 'Cultural conservatism'. While sections of the Conservative Party were anxious about the decentralised and marketised school provision, others were equally concerned with educational programmes aimed at 'raising standards' and preserving 'traditional' education (teacher centred pedagogy, subject-based curriculum). Their influence is clearly to be seen in the form and in the continuing struggles over the national curriculum (Ball, 1993). Though schools were to be freed to manage themselves, there was considerable resistance to suggestions, made by the neo-liberals, that they should be equally free to devise their own educational programmes, in response say to local or community needs (Whitty, 1990). Except in the case of City Technology Colleges then, all state schools, including GM schools, were required to follow the national curriculum. Both strands within the party, however, were committed to a system of national testing. For the cultural restorationists, and the neo-liberals it was important that parents should have clear performance indicators as to the quality of education offered by individual schools. A national curriculum and assessment procedure thus offered the possibility of making inter-school and cross-sector comparisons. Indeed it was on this basis that it should be possible to compare the performance of LMS and GM schools, and thus measure the impact of self-governance, that civil servants also drafted in conditions which originally prevented schools from changing their admission policies and insisted on parity of funding between the two sectors (Filz and Halpin, 1991).

At the time they were established then, GM schools were autonomous from LEAs, self-governing with respect to plant, staffing and recurrent cost items (the neo-liberal agenda) but subject to central government constraints in respect of educational and pupil ideologies (the 'cultural restorationist' agenda). Because of this tension between the two agendas it has not always been easy for schools or parents to identify the specific benefits of GM status.

Thus going GM or opting out involved not only greater autonomy but also increased responsibilities for schools but without any real gains in their control of the form and character of educational programmes. We believe that this has been influential in determining the scale and pace of schools opting out and this in turn has driven the state to modify the GM schools' policy. In so doing, there has been a considerable shift in the autonomy of schools. We detail these arguments in the next section.

Developing GM Schools' Policy

It is important to understand that GM schools' policy provides an enabling framework, and thus schools are afforded the opportunity to seek and achieve GM status. The policy has been in operation for nearly five years and in one council respect it has not been as successful as the government anticipated. Of the 24000 schools in England and Wales (approximately 4000 secondary schools, 20000 primary schools) less than 1000 or 4% are operating as GM schools. The government predicted at the time of the last election that 1500 GM schools would be operating by April 1994. That target will not be achieved. Additionally, the take-up has been uneven. There are, for example, LEAs in England and Wales have 'lost' 20% or more of their secondary schools to the GM sector, and in one borough, Hillingdon, it is unlikely that it will have any secondary schools under its control by the end of this year.

In playing the numbers game, that is emphasising via press releases, ministerial statements, and party conference speeches the numbers of schools which have opted out the government has created an unnecessary legitimisation crisis for what is now seen as its flagship education policy. For although the number of schools opting out is small, the policy has had a very considerable impact in local educational settings. Our interviews with LEAs, for example, clearly indicate that their capacity to plan provision of education, especially where this involves school closures, has been severely diminished. Nevertheless, the government has felt

compelled to drive forward with policy adaptations aimed at increasing the number of GM schools. The measures include:

- a. Advantageous funding of GM schools. Since 1990 opted out schools have benefited from greater financial support for building and maintenance programmes than their LEA counterparts. It is calculated that GM schools have received between two and four times more money to pay not only for repairs but via 'named capital projects' but also for new buildings and facilities (Bush and Coleman, 1992; Rogers, 1992; Fitz, Halpin and Pover, 1993). In addition, they receive a one off-transition grants as well as a supplement to their per capita determined annual maintenance grant. These sums, which are approximately 16% of their per capita determined grant, are clawed back from LEAs to pay for services formerly provided centrally. In a large number of LEAs, however, the amount retained by the LEA from the general school budget is less than 16%. Therefore, many GM schools have been allocated a disproportionate share (sometimes double) of the overall LEA budget which reduces the LEA capacity to support schools which remain under its control and for which they have responsibility. This policy, however, has explicit backing from the Prime Minister (Bates, 1992). Scrutiny and criticism of the advantageous funding of GM schools by a parliamentary committee, however, has been partly responsible for a severe reduction in capital expenditure on GM schools, due to be implemented next year.

The funding regime however, which operates through central government grants has enabled the state to determine to influence directly and indirectly, what GM schools teach. Thus, it has supported the development or refurbishment of science and technology facilities but not sports facilities, for example. In addition, heads have suggested to us, that a list of schools which have so far received little or no capital grant might be an indication of those GM schools which it is willing to see 'rationalised' in the longer term.

- b. Government funding for a non-governmental agency. The Grant-Maintained Schools' Centre, to support GM schools in the process of opting out, and promote the idea of G schools (see Hackett, 1994; Wohlstetter and Anderson, 1994). Although it has been claimed that the GMSC has primarily a support role, the boundaries between it, the Grant-Maintained Schools' Centre, Grant-Maintained Schools' Trust and Choice in Education - the latter more concerned

with the promotion of GM policy - have never been perceived as secure. Indeed, the organisations have shared the same buildings in the past (Hackett, 1994).

- c. Fostering specialisations. The clearest example here is the favourable treatment of GM schools under the Technology Schools' Initiative (TSI). Intending to enhance their provision for technology - related subject, GM and voluntary schools were allocated 40% of the initial budget. In March of this year, only GM schools were considered eligible for funds under a new initiative to further promote the teaching of technology and science. Unlike previous arrangements which benefited LEA schools also, this new money has been allocated to twelve GM schools, which will receive some £3.5 million in total (Maxwell, 1994). the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has interpreted this last move as 'grossly unfair', and intended to breathe life into a flagging policy. On this basis it is considering taking legal action against the Secretary of State.

In addition, the government has established a policy framework within which schools, without procedural difficulties, may select up to 10% of their pupils on their 'aptitude' or 'ability' to benefit from specialist curriculum programmes. Thus, Longley Boys School in Bromley selects up to 10% of its intake on the basis of sporting or musical aptitude (Blackburn, 1992). Others are taking the opportunity to select a proportion of academically able students in order to create 'fast streams' or 'tracks' within all-ability schools.

- d. Easing the transition to GM status. Under the 1993 Act, governors are now required to vote once only, without a confirming vote, to apply to the Secretary of State for GM status. Governing bodies, under the same legislation, are also annually required to consider, formally, whether or not they wish to apply for GM status, and to report on the basis of their decision.

- e. High profile publicity. Full page advertisements in the national and educational press have extolled the virtues of GM status in the early months of 1994. These stress the resource advantages of GM schools - more equipment, better buildings, and better pupil-teacher ratios - than LMS schools. Under the 1993 Act, the powers of LEAs to publish material in support of LMS schools has been curtailed. The Secretary of State has further taken powers to overturn ballots where parents have voted against opting out, if they deem there were irregularities in the campaigns mounted by LEAs (Jamieson, 1994).

f. Opting in. Provisions of the 1993 Education Act enables schools appropriately 'sponsored' to seek GM status. The sponsors are required to find 15% of the start-up costs. These measures allow previously independent fee-paying schools to move into the state sector. Thus far, denominational schools, such as those serving the Sikh community, have shown the greatest interest (Hackett, 1994). The Act, however, does permit any group of sponsors, whether they are associated with a previously established school or not, to set up a school and apply for GM status, and thus state-funding. Certainly these provisions go a considerable way to meeting the objections of those critical of original GM schools' policy in that it did not provide for new entrants into the educational market. Paradoxically, however, the government is in something of a dilemma because its policies are moving in the direction of expansion, diversity and choice, while at the same time it is seeking to squeeze several hundred thousand so-called 'surplus places' out of the system (Pyke, 1994; Education, 1994).

g. Compulsory transfer. The 1993 Act introduces a new procedure for the transfer of schools to GM status. Schools, following inspection by the newly established privatised inspectorate OFSTED, deemed to be 'failing', may, at the direction of the Secretary of State be placed under the governance of an 'education association'. Education associations will be groups composed of ex-headteachers and the like, charged with placing schools on a sound footing, by making them managerially efficient and educationally effective. After this has been achieved, the Secretary of State may grant them GM status.

h. The Funding Agency for Schools (FAS). This agency will begin its work in April 1994. It will distribute grants to existing GM schools, receive and make recommendations on applications for GM status and is expected to promote the principle of schools opting out (Meikle, 1994). This last feature has been confirmed by the party political nature of the first board appointed to oversee the agency's operations (Judd, 1994). The FAS also raises a number of important constitutional issues with respect to the governance of education and these will be discussed in the last section of this paper.

In combination the above measures demonstrate the government's commitment to press ahead with GM schools' policy, which is now widely interpreted as 'tailoring'. Indeed the number of schools proceeding to ballot this year (37) has fallen against the number (95) in the same period last year. Moreover the number of ballots in

favour (27) has declined against last year's figure (75). The majority of those voting in favour of opting out are primary schools (Meikle, 1994). What larger policy trends can we also discern from these numerous adjustments to the original GM schools' policy?

First they signal the government's determination to defend, sustain and promote, at considerable political cost, an educational policy which has not taken off on the scale predicted. This in turn demonstrates the symbolic value the government places on a policy which is a condensate of its resolve to restructure public sector institutions based on principles of decentralisation, deregulation and marketisation. Second, and paradoxically, these policy developments entail a significant growth in the state's capacity to interfere in and direct resource management and educational provision within GM schools. And its willingness to decouple local schools from locally elected authorities in a variety of ways suggests it wants to expand its reach even further. Third, a question may now be placed against the autonomy of schools within this policy framework, insofar as autonomy might simply be a new form of state regulation which enables the state to press forward with its educational agenda the more efficiently because it is unimpeded by bureaucratic and professional resistance. On the other hand, this policy framework has been directly beneficial to GM schools insofar as they have maintained a resource advantage over their competing LEA counterparts, and have been granted considerably more flexibility in area of pupil admission. In turn, their capacity to create market niches, or to respond quickly to perceived shifts in parental choice has been considerably enhanced. It is in that light that we now turn to consider how GM schools have reacted to the changing policy framework we have outlined above.

GM Schools and GM Policy

Given the considerable symbolic investment the government has made in GM schools' policy, how have schools responded to the opportunities that the policy is said to present? And in view of the constrained self-governance that we outlined in the early sections of our paper, what issues confront autonomous, incorporated schools in the current policy climate? Drawing on our interview-based research in GM schools and on documentary sources in the public domain it is possible to discern the following:

a. Governance and Management In our previous research reports we reported that heads were often the prime movers in school-based decisions to apply for GM status. We also noted that school heads had taken a pre-eminent position in policy determination with respect to resources, staffing and curricular programmes (Halpin, Power and Filtz, 1993, Filtz, Halpin, Power, 1993). Interviews with chairs of governors and with key members of governing bodies further confirm that heads are the lead policy makers in GM schools. Governors we have interviewed noted that they are strongly guided in their decisions via information provided by the heads, by heads' interpretations of educational issues, and that they expressed policy and managerial preferences. Without any countervailing advice from or input by a local tier of administration, the direct connection between the centre, and self-governing schools, situates heads powerfully at the centre of all flows of information, advice and policy directives coming into the school. In the UK context then there is some correspondence between degrees of autonomy and the capacity for heads to act as the lead decision-makers, both with respect to their governing bodies and the teaching staff. As we noted earlier however, this has been an aspect of power and control over which governing bodies and heads have been in conflict.

b. The Division of Labour With greater responsibilities for budget management and greater resources at their disposal, GM schools have tended to increase the number of non-teaching staff. This is confirmed by our own school-based research and by the Grant Maintained Schools' Centre annual report (GMSC, 1993). In the last year, for example, about half of all GM schools in the GMSC survey and about 40% of primary schools have increased the number of administrative staff. Within secondary schools, the creation of a new post of school administrator or bursar, often from outside education but with a substantial finance/administrative background has been a common approach.

Some schools, however, have been concerned to appoint an existing educational professional to the post so as to ensure that decision on expenditure and educationally-led. Few primary schools are sufficiently large so as to entertain a real choice between these two models and often enhance the role and responsibilities of the school secretary (Wohlstetter and Anderson, 1994). The new appointees generally become members of the senior management team, a small group which consists of the head, and the deputy heads plus others so designated by the head, who conduct the day-to-day affairs of the school. Evidence from research on LMS schools (Marren and Livacic, 1994,

Simkins, 1994) and our first somewhat impressionistic analysis of surveys conducted amongst staff in GM schools as part of our research, suggest that it is the senior management teams who absorb the impact of site-based managerial responsibilities, self-governance and increase of autonomy. Although further analysis is needed, our preliminary findings suggest that self-governing status per se has not as yet had a significant impact on the practices or values of teachers whose orientation is predominantly towards the transmission of knowledge. On the other hand, our own research and that cited above in relation to LMS schools points decisively in the direction that SMTs have become managerial in outlook, increasingly sensitive to their school's market reputation and more willing to devise policies to secure their school's reputation and advantages in local educational markets (see Ball and Dave, 1992, Simkins, 1994). The benefits for teaching staff then, we would argue, arise not from the greater degree of control these schools exercise over their affairs, but from the increased resources which have been directed towards classrooms within a physical environment made more pleasant via the application of generous capital grants.

c. Pupil Identity. Within a framework which now encourages specialisation within curriculum programmes, and allows GM schools some flexibility with regard to pupil admissions there are some notable trends. The government, for example, has targeted GM schools to promote its latest version of technology colleges, that is institutions equipped and directed towards a technological/science emphasis within their curriculum provision. In the most recent round of grants, eleven of the twelve schools to be designated as technology colleges are GM schools, the other is an LEA school which will apply for GM status in the near future. These schools will select pupils on the basis of their ability to benefit from the school's specialist courses, presumably in the same way that City Technology Colleges (CTCs) select their recruits. These twelve schools will share between some £3 million extra funding (Maxwell, 1994), and are viewed by ministers as the 'advanced guard' of some 160 technology colleges to be established in the next two or three years. In an earlier initiative (the Technology Schools Initiative) both GM and LEA schools were able to bid for extra resources. The technology colleges programme further emphasises the extent to which the government is employing GM schools as the means to implement its curriculum objectives and the degree to which GM schools are encouraged to select pupils by aptitude or ability. There are other examples of this, however, as schools take the opportunities to provide within the new policy framework.

For example, in a sector which already has a large proportion of 11-18 age range schools and thus a relatively large proportion of post-compulsory age students, GM schools are set to move further in that direction. The Secretary of State has proved sympathetic, not only to those schools who wish to add a 6th Form (post-compulsory 16-18 classes), but also to those who wish to admit girls into the 6th Forms of all-boys schools (GMS, 1993). Not only are those GM schools securing their market niche against competing local schools by offering all-through secondary education critics would claim that they are offering a more expensive form of post-compulsory education than neighbouring Further Education and Tertiary Colleges (Blackburn, 1994). Six GM schools were given permission to establish 6th Forms last year and a further eight have been granted permission to do so this year. Critics of GM schools' policy argued that GM schools, in the long-run would move in the direction of academic selection. Evidence from our research and recently developments with the GM sector more generally, suggest that critics may be well be correct in their predictions. Indeed over 50% of all 'grammar' or academic selective secondary schools have already opted for GM status. Last year, for example, three GM schools successfully applied to become fully selective after acquiring GM status (Croall et al, 1994). GM schools in Berkshire, Havering, Dorset, Barnet, Lambeth, Sutton and Wandsworth, have expressed their intention of admitting between 30%-100% of pupils on the grounds of academic ability (Croall et al, 1994). In changing the character of schools, from comprehensive to academically selective, there is some evidence that agreements are being arrived at between central government and the schools, and without any consultation with parents. Indeed, in one instance, Dame Alice Owen School in Hertfordshire, where parents voted for the school to opt out on the basis that it remained a comprehensive school, the ministry indicated that approval for GM status would be granted on the condition that 50% of pupils were to be selected by ability.

Alongside the 'official' moves towards selection, there are the more 'unofficial' selection processes that GM schools have employed. In one study of the first 100 schools to opt out, the researchers found that 30% were using parent interviews, school reports or tests to select, covertly, pupils (Bush and Coleman, 1993). Thus, while schools may still continue to admit pupils from all bands or streams of ability, these informal selection procedures can be used to identify the most motivated pupils or pupils whose parents are likely to support fully the aims and objectives of the school. In our own research, we have encountered two boys schools employing these unofficial selection methods. There has not, as

yet, been a rush towards selection, however, and indeed although the policy framework provides opportunities for GM schools to change their character, there have been instances where schools have been forced to withdraw plans to change admission policy in response to parental protests.

Although these responses by GM schools, to a policy which allows them greater determination over their pupil identities, are seemingly diverse, there is a clear overall pattern which explains both the policy and the responses to it. The 'autonomy' which the state has granted GM schools in connection with admission policies, and the policy choices made by GM schools in a deregulated, decentralised market system, have continued to move the GM sector in the direction of fostering 'traditional' modes of educational provision. The model of 'good education' provided by the state, and carried forward by the GM schools who see a market advantage in doing so, harks back to a model of provision which existed in the immediate post-war years in which the high status schools were all-through 11-18 age range, academically selective and predominantly single-sex. While the new technology colleges do not correspond with this model, however the selection of pupils to attend them has a family resemblance to the sifting and sorting of students in 'traditional' educational practices.

We have mentioned already the resource advantages enjoyed by GM schools. To this must be added their strategies to change the character of GM schools in the direction of traditional education. We have argued in the past that school autonomy has not been employed either for curriculum or pedagogic innovations. All this suggests that GM schools have, via their individual policy decisions, and within a policy framework which gives them a particular steer, been involved in the creation of an increasingly two-tier system of educational provision. What these findings argue for is a view that school autonomy per se does not foster necessarily diversity of provision within sharply competitive educational settings, nor does it expand parental choice, particularly in contexts where the schools are empowered to select pupils. It could be argued that convergence rather than divergence has been the outcome in the UK.

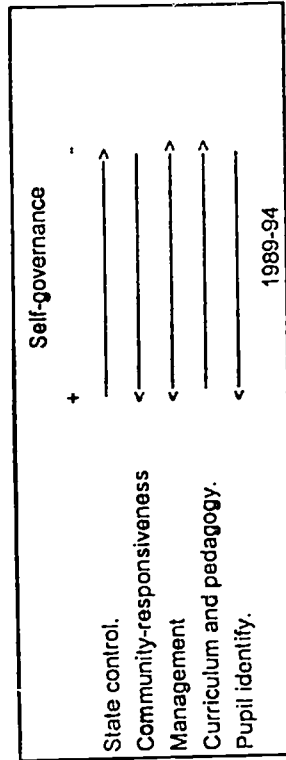
- d. The Funding Agency for Schools. The FAS commences operation on 1st April 1994, and will manage some £2 billion of public money. Its primary purpose is to distribute grants to GM schools, thus taking over from the DfE who were formerly charged with this responsibility. The non-governmental public body, however, whose board members are political appointees will also work alongside LEAs in

planning and provision of education provision in those authorities where 10% of primary or secondary pupils attend GM schools. In small LEAs, one GM secondary school would be sufficient to trigger the entry of the FAS. Thus, the FAS will be involved in decisions about the closure, amalgamation or re-designation of schools which are in fact owned and operated by LEAs. The present figures suggest that when it begins its work, 46 LEAs (i.e. almost half of those in England and Wales) will have to work with the FAS. A review of the membership of the FAS board reveals that it contains chief executives of companies which have made substantial donations to the Conservative Party, three GM school heads, a representative of independent schools, and an Anglican clergyman (not one of the nominees of the Church of England) known to be a supporter of opting out. This suggests its work will involve the promotion of opting out wherever opportunities present themselves, especially in situations where decisions have to be made concerning the closure of a GM or an LEA school.

The large significance of the FAS relates to the change it signals for the governance of education. The Agency is accountable 'up' to ministers but it is difficult to see how it might be accountable 'down' to parents in ways that they might influence its work or call it to account for its decisions. In other words, the funding of GM schools, the planning and provision of education in areas where GM schools are well-established, and the formation of new schools, will be centrally, rather than locally determined, by appointees and administrators reporting 'up' rather than locally elected public officials teaching local bureaucracies. Under these arrangements then, autonomous schools will be potentially less community-responsive than previously was the case. In fact the very autonomy of GM schools makes them rather more vulnerable to pressure from the state to implement curriculum programmes, changes in character or organisation, and more susceptible to the shifts in government funding requirements than their LEA counterparts.

Conclusion

If we return to the analytical framework we introduced at the beginning of our paper it is possible to identify the shifting nature of GM schools 'autonomy' since their introduction in 1989. In light of the discussion above, we propose that the following trends can be identified, represented schematically in the diagram below;



At the AERA Annual Meeting in 1993, John Witte argued that within the framework of raising levels of achievement within education systems 'choice' programmes were not 'magic bullets'. Much the same can be said for policies which promote autonomous, self-governing schools. As in the case of GM schools, not only do we have to strike a balance sheet of the benefits and non-benefits of these policies for schools, we also have to be concerned with the larger objectives these policies serve.

The promotion of school autonomy in the UK have to be seen in the larger context of moves to restructure public sector service provision. An integral part of this process, in health, welfare, and education has involved the dismantling of locally elected bodies and their replacement by politically appointed non-governmental agencies. They in turn regulate provider institutions such as schools and hospitals. It is against this background that the 'autonomy' of GM schools has to be situated.

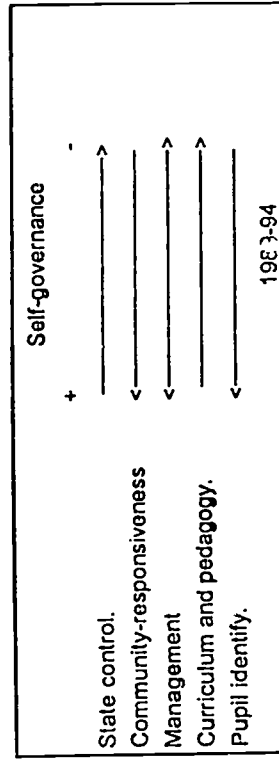
The gains in management efficiency and responsive, which heads and their SMTs find beneficial, therefore have to be set alongside the increased powers that the central state has arrogated to itself to regulate what autonomous schools do and to influence how they do it. On the other hand both the policy framework, the powers given to the FAS and ministerial actions also suggest that 'autonomy' for GM schools translates not only into 'freedom' from LEA control but also possible 'remoteness' from local communities.

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The gains in management efficiency and responsive, which heads and their SMTs find beneficial, therefore have to be set alongside the increased powers that the central state has arrogated to itself to regulate what autonomous schools do and to influence how they do it. On the other hand both the policy framework, the powers given to the FAS and ministerial actions also suggest that 'autonomy' for GM schools translates not only into 'freedom' from LEA control but also possible 'remoteness' from local communities. The current policy suggests that GM schools

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have increased resources to develop admissions and curriculum policies without taking account of or being responsible to any local constituencies.

There are also clear gains for GM schools in their regulation of pupil identities. In playing the market, however, schools in the GM sector have tended to move towards a traditional model of 'good education' which harks back to a pre-comprehensive/common school era. It is model which places value on pupil sifting, sorting and selection, by age, stage, ability and gender. It is also model which has served the middle classes well in their social and cultural reproductive strategies. The pressures on self-governing GM schools, by the state and in the market have thus resulted in trends towards 'old' solutions via the resort to 'traditional' education as a response to the challenge of raising levels of achievement.

Notes

1. This paper draws on an ESRC supported study of GM schools' policy in England and Wales (Grant No. R00023 3815). There are policy variations in Scotland. The data here refers to England and Wales only.
2. The following justification of site-based management was offered by one of our civil service interviewees: the policy was intended "to give schools the freedom to run their affairs the way they wanted to run them, not within an imposed framework from outside. It's a model of seeing the school as a small business. It's the logical conclusion, in some ways, of financial delegation policies ... its obviously going one step further in giving the schools complete freedom." (DES Civil Servant, January, 1990.)
3. Kenneth Baker's description of the Department of Education and Science contains his view of the 'education establishment' and its supposed malign influence. "Of all the Whitehall Departments, the DES was among those with the strongest in-house ideology. There was a clear 1960s ethos and a very clear agenda which permeated virtually all the civil servants. It was rooted in progressive orthodoxies, in egalitarianism and in the comprehensive school. It was devoutly anti-excellence, anti-selection and anti-market. The DES represented perfectly the theory of 'producer capture', whereby the interests of the producer prevail against the interests of the consumer. Not only was the Department in league with teacher unions, University Departments of Education, teacher training theories and local authorities, it also acted against any threats which ministers might pose." (Baker, 1993:168.)

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